

Sighting of a Clouded Leopard (*Neofelis nebulosa*) in a Troop of Pigtail Macaques (*Macaca nemestrina*) in Khao Yai National Park, Thailand

On 7 January 1990 a clouded leopard (*Neofelis nebulosa*) was sighted by two biologists (the author and Lisa Climo) while walking through broadleaf evergreen forest, elevation 760 m, in Khao Yai National Park, Thailand. The sighting took place at 0700 h, 300 m into the forest from the Ban Pak ranger village at Park Headquarters, while approaching the Maw Singto gibbon study area.

Walking along a main trail we encountered a large troop of pigtail macaques (*Macaca nemestrina*) on both sides of the trail. On our approach many monkeys started to disperse by rapid descent from the trees to escape along the ground. This action was taken with comparatively little vocalization and continued as we walked openly into the centre of the troop.

Many troop members were still in the trees as we halted on the trail to observe them. After about two minutes of stationary observation, a series of throaty vocalizations spread rapidly through the troop on both sides of the trail. At this moment I saw a dark elongated shape, larger than a large male pigtail macaque, make a head-first descent from a tree 4 m away from us. It was clearly visible as a felid as it landed with a weighty crunch on the forest floor, and bounded off to disappear in undergrowth 8 m away. Its left flank, but not head, was visible as it turned away, giving a clear view of its hind-quarters and back as it fled. The sighting lasted no more than 5 seconds but the cat clearly had the clouded pattern on its main body which measured at least 75 cm from tip of head to end of rump. The tail was thick with fur, held in a downward position, broadly marked and measured about 70 cm.

The cat observed was too large and heavy to have been a marbled cat (*Felis marmorata*) and from the distinctive pattern must therefore have been a clouded leopard.

The tree the clouded leopard came out of was 20 m high with no branches below 15 m, just a smooth, hard trunk. The tree crown was compact with the only horizontal branches being flimsy. The thickest branches were at an angle of about 45 degrees. The tree crown did not connect with any of the neighbouring crowns, which suggests that the leopard was perched in the tree crown at a minimum height of 15 m and that it had got into the tree by the same route by which it descended. It seems most likely that the leopard had to drop the last 7 m of its descent as the gradient on this side of the trunk, below this height, was not in the animals favour.

The macaque troop's resounding alarm calls coincided not with the approach of observers towards the troop but with the descent by the clouded leopard from the tree minutes later. This suggests that the leopard had been concealed in the tree crown undetected by the macaques before our appearance caused it to break cover.

Second-hand reports indicate that the clouded leopard will prey on monkeys of considerable size in the wild and a captive specimen easily despatched a large male pigtail macaque and ate it (SELOUS & BANKS, 1935). Our sighting adds indirect evidence that clouded leopards prey on monkeys in the wild. The resounding, throaty alarm vocalizations of the macaques indicate that the clouded leopard was a threat to troop

members. Furthermore, the leopard was found in the centre of the troop and must have been concealed.

Speculation as to how the clouded leopard got into the middle of a troop of macaques undetected may be assisted by the fact that this troop was seen in virtually the same place the day before the leopard was sighted and along the same trail. It is possible that the leopard detected the inactive troop by night and climbed the tree in their midst.

This sighting confirms a degree of arboreality indicating that clouded leopards use trees either as resting sites, as suggested by RABINOWITZ (1987), or for lying in wait for more arboreal prey, or both. Reports received by RAFFLES (1821) from local people in Sumatra indicated that clouded leopards sleep and often lie in wait for their prey on trees. The leopard's escape response, however, would confirm that at least when travelling the clouded leopard is more at home on the ground (SELOUS & BANKS, 1935).

The sighting of the clouded leopard so close to the Ban Pak ranger village is in contrast to previous reports that they do not venture close to human settlements and are confined to the remotest areas deep inside reserves (SANTIAPILLAI, 1989). There had in fact been considerable human activity along this same trail in the weeks prior to the sighting. It is worth noting also that this area has been a frequent location for sightings of pigtail macaques and that these monkeys, if they are the prey of clouded leopards, may draw them closer to human settlement.

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